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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
AGRICULTURAL MARKETING SERVICE  
AGRICULTURAL ESTIMATES DIVISION  
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

Report on Meeting of Panel of Consultants

March 26-27, 1956

Panel members in attendance were L. L. Boger, W. T. Federer, and G. M. Kuznets. Raymond Nassimbene and Harold T. Lingard of the Office of Statistical Standards in the Budget Bureau and Earl Houseman, Chief Statistical Officer in AMS also attended the sessions. The group met with representatives of the Division to discuss background and plans for a number of prospective projects that may be undertaken by the Division in FY 1957. The Chiefs of the various Branches in Washington and members of their staffs discussed the proposed new lines of work mentioned in the January 16-17 Panel report. The program of Agricultural Price Statistics also was discussed in considerable detail.

The Panel makes a number of recommendations in the light of progress of the research work to date and other activities planned by the Division:

1. The Panel strongly recommends that the Division include sufficient funds in budget requests for FY 1958 to expand the research program above the level in prospect for FY 1957. The additional funds should be used to put studies in the North Central region on an experimental operating level in FY 1958 in a manner similar to that proposed for the Southern States in FY 1957. This recommendation reaffirms the original objective of progressive expansion of the work, year by year.
2. Because objective estimates of cotton acreage and yield (and hence of production) and objective yield forecasts on a national basis can be achieved by relatively minor additions to the surveys projected for the Southern States, the Panel recommends that arrangements be made immediately to include enough of the country in the surveys so that all cotton production in the United States will be covered by the sample. This involves including cotton-growing counties of California, Arizona and New Mexico as part of the universe from which samples would be drawn for the farm survey in June 1957 for estimates of cotton acreage; sample fields from those areas would be included in the objective forecasting and yield estimating studies conducted during the ensuing crop season.
3. The proposed Corn Quality studies are a desirable addition to the studies on objective forecasts and estimates of corn yield proposed in the Corn Belt. The Panel was pleased to learn that these studies will be made an integral part of the research program and that the observations will be made on an objective basis in a manner comparable to those used for yield forecasts and estimates. The Panel feels that these studies should be considered as falling into two distinct phases:
  - (a) The collection of objective plant observations that have a bearing on Corn Quality, taken concurrently with objective data used for forecasting and estimating yields and;

- (b) Studies on the relationship of pertinent observable grain characteristics to the storability of corn in the crib.

Consideration should be given to securing the assistance of college Plant Physiology, Climatology, and Statistics departments, as required, in addition to assistance that can be rendered by the Statistical Laboratories at Ames and Raleigh in these studies.

4. The Panel was particularly pleased to learn that the proposed studies on farm employment statistics will be integrated closely with present research studies in the Southern States. In the Panel's view, the purpose of the research program as a whole is the development of an improved statistical system in the broadest sense; individual studies by the Division relating to various subject matter fields should continue to be considered in relation to the large-scale research project now in progress.
5. The proposed expansion of the statistical program on potatoes seems to follow a traditional pattern of evolution. While it is understood that the proposed program was developed in direct response to the immediate needs of data users it appears to the Panel that the long-run interest of the Division in basic improvement of estimates and forecasts did not receive proper recognition in the formulation of this program. The introduction of objective procedures offers most promise of accomplishing improvements in both estimates and forecasts. The Panel, therefore, strongly recommends that part of the additional funds requested (perhaps of the order of \$20,000 to \$30,000) be devoted to studies aimed at objective acreage, yield, and stocks estimates in at least one of the areas to be covered by the proposed new work. It is recognized that this recommendation may entail a significant curtailment in the scope of the proposed expansion in the immediate future. This would be regrettable, but in the Panel's view, less damaging to the long-run interest of the Division than the failure to initiate research promptly on basic improvements.
6. Discussion of the proposed statistics on Horticultural Specialties and of proposed modifications in the Cold Storage reporting program indicates that an important problem arises in specifying the universe and obtaining samples which represent adequate cross sections of the entire universe. Maintaining up-to-date lists of establishments is always troublesome, particularly keeping abreast of new establishments. The Panel recommends that the Division consider the possibilities of using area sampling to check the completeness of lists of establishments and also to provide unbiased estimates of the total numbers of establishments in the universe. That area sample could also be used for contacting samples of non-respondents, and for sample enumerations as alternatives to complete enumerations, if there should be need for such activities.
7. Discussions on the Quarterly Pig surveys indicate that the Division proposes to coordinate activities which are now conducted as State programs in a number of States, primarily from the viewpoint of



issuing a consolidated report for all States concerned. The Panel feels that some phases of this work can be tied in with the research surveys that are being started this coming June. The Panel recommends that these Quarterly Pig surveys be tied in as closely as possible with other surveys conducted under the research program. Some of the pertinent data now collected in the existing Quarterly Surveys might be obtained directly from surveys being developed under the research program. In addition, results from an expanded June Survey, which should develop from present research activities, should provide estimates of pig populations that would be extremely valuable in the preparation of estimates from September, December, and March Quarterly Surveys.

8. The topic of Prices covers an extremely wide field. The Panel can make only a few general suggestions on the program at this time. As the present research program of the Division expands to operational levels, it is recommended that some research be initiated on improved methods of collecting data on prices received by farmers and prices paid by farmers. The Division should consider putting a small item (perhaps \$20,000 to \$25,000) in its budget requests for FY 1958 for some preliminary studies toward this end. Emphasis should be on securing more objective data on prices and related information (sales, purchases) perhaps through the device of a permanent panel of respondents who are willing to keep accounts, or by some other suitable method.
9. In conclusion, the Panel wishes to reiterate recommendations 4 - 9 in the report on the January 16-17 meeting. Those recommendations should be considered again as part of the recommendations of the present session. In carrying out the objectives of the research program, the Division should make adequate provision for transition to future operating levels. Budget requests for Fiscal Year 1958 should include funds for progress in that direction. At the time of the January meeting, those recommendations were stressed particularly. The Panel feels that it is only by giving close attention to those recommendations that fruitful developments of maximum benefit to the Division as a whole can be expected from the research program.

